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SUBJECT: GAZANS IN THE WEST BANK; REPRESENTATIVE INDIVIDUAL
SNAPSHOTS

REF: JERUSALEM 2239 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Consul General Daniel Rubinstein for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

11. (SBU) Summary. The case of Berlanty Azzam, a Bethelhem University student arrested by the GOI and deported to Gaza (reftels), has attracted significant media and NGO attention to the situation of roughly 25,000 Gaza residents living and studying in the West Bank. On December 13, EconOff met with a number of such Palestinians in a conversation organized by Israeli NGO Gisha, who provided representative individual stories. End Summary.

Gazans in the West Bank

12. (U) Following are individual stories of Palestinians who hold GOI-issued cards, according to which they are "Gaza residents," even though they currently live in the West Bank:

13. (C/NF) Misbah travelled through the Erez crossing between Gaza and Israel and onward to the West Bank in 1999 to study at Birzeit University. In 2005, he requested a permit to return to Gaza three times, but was denied. He now considers Ramallah his home and the place where his ties are strongest. Even so, he lives in fear of being caught by Israeli authorities, and suffers from lack of contact with his family. He has not left Ramallah since 2000. His father recently received a permit to travel from Gaza for open-heart surgery in Nablus, and his mother was granted a permit as his escort. Misbah was able to spend time with his parents in Ramallah, but not able to accompany his father to the hospital, as the operation took place in Nablus.

14. (C/NF) Muhanned travelled to the West Bank in 1999 to study mechanical engineering at Birzeit University. He married a West Bank resident in 2006, though his Gaza-based parents and family could not attend the wedding. As the producer of 12 films that have been screened at 70 film festivals, he tried to attend the Dubai Film Festival to pitch his current project and raise money, but was unable to obtain a permit. He typically applies for a permit five times a year, with only occasional success. He obtained a one-year permit in October 2008 that allowed him to travel to London, where he did some graduate degree coursework. He believes that he is falling behind his peers in the film industry due to his inability to travel.

15. (C/NF) Muhanned added that, prior to October 2009, he traveled through the West Bank frequently, and was often

detained for several hours at a time because of his Gaza ID card. While some of post's NGO contacts believe the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have a general policy of not returning Gazans who entered the West Bank before 2000 (Berlanty Azzam entered in 2005), Muhanned said that he no longer feels safe traveling outside of Ramallah. He noted a recent spike in arrests and removals of Gazan residents in the West Bank. Upon his most recent return to the West Bank from Jordan (via the Allenby Bridge), he was given a single-entry, three-month tourist visa, with a "PA Areas Only" stamp. Muhanned claimed that the issuance of a tourist visa demonstrates "that the Israelis see Gazans as foreigners in the West Bank."

¶6. (C/NF) Azza travelled to the West Bank in 2005 when granted permission to undergo surgery there. She never returned to Gaza. Though she is trained as a civil engineer, she could not find work for two years in Gaza before her departure. In the West Bank, she readily secured a job at a contracting company, but she was unable to do her work, since she could not travel within the West Bank for fear of arrest and deportation. For the last three years, she has been working for an NGO focusing on conflict resolution. Unable to fulfill the responsibilities of her current job, such as travelling abroad for fundraising, her NGO employer is now looking to hire someone who can take on these responsibilities. Though she now considers Ramallah her home, she is unwilling to take steps to establish real roots there, such as purchasing a home, based on her fear that she could be deported from the West Bank at any moment.

¶7. (C/NF) Walid travelled to the West Bank in 1998 to study psychology at Birzeit University; he is now working in web programming and music production. He was married seven

months ago to a woman in Bethlehem. He has not left the West Bank since 2000. Over the last four years he has only travelled a couple of times outside Ramallah, including to his own wedding. Over the last four months, he has not traveled at all inside the West Bank, due to a perception (shared by the other participants) that the GOI is cracking down on Gaza ID holders and deporting them from the West Bank.

¶8. (C/NF) Jihad travelled to the West Bank to study at Birzeit University in 1986. Since 1995, he has not returned to Gaza, fearing that he would not be allowed to return. The last time he departed through the Erez crossing, in 1995, Jihad traveled with a Palestinian Authority (PA) minister, who -- like all ministers at the time -- had the authority to escort Palestinians through Erez without requiring a permit.

Options for "Legalizing" Status

¶9. (SBU) The PA Ministry of Civil Affairs has successfully petitioned the GOI to change the residency (from Gaza to the West Bank) of a few hundred Palestinians since 2000. The adjustments are understood to be a gesture to senior PA officials, and our NGO contacts do not believe the process is a vehicle for adjusting the status of the 25,000 or so Gaza ID holders currently residing in the West Bank.

¶10. (SBU) According to the Israeli NGO Gisha and Palestinian contacts, in order to receive a "staying permit in Judea and Samaria" from the GOI, a Gaza ID holder must have entered the West Bank before September 2000 and lived continuously in the West Bank. He/she must have married a West Bank ID holder and have children, and pass a security check. The "staying permit" has a three-month validity and must be renewed every three months. It is unknown how many staying permits have been issued.

Sending Money to Gaza

¶11. (SBU) According to the Gaza ID holders with whom we spoke during the last three years, the only way to transfer money from the West Bank to Gaza is through the Bank of Palestine (BoP). Transfers are required to be made from one BoP

account to another, and the recipient must be an immediate relative -- i.e., mother, father, sibling, etc -- of the sender. Transfers are limited to NIS 2,000 (approximately USD 525), and NIS is the only denomination allowed for transfer. According to our contacts, the transfer fee is 11 percent.

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